

TESTIMONY OF OLIVIA A. GOLDEN, DIRECTOR
D.C. CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AGENCY
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
FOR THE
“CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES OVERSIGHT HEARING”
October 3, 2002

Good afternoon, Chairwoman Allen and members of the Committee on Human Services. I am Olivia Golden, Director of the District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency. Thank you for this opportunity to report on the status of reform at CFSA. Thank you, also, for your support and dedication to the needs of our city’s most vulnerable children. We are especially grateful to Chairwoman Allen for her encouragement and leadership as we reform child welfare in the District of Columbia.

This hearing provides an opportunity to report on where we have been, what CFSA has accomplished so far, and the tremendous challenges still before us to construct the viable safety net that abused and neglected children in our city deserve. After many years, when local child protection was inadequately funded and understaffed, U.S. District Judge Thomas F. Hogan found in 1991 that the city’s child welfare system was “in a shambles.” To a large degree, through the leadership of Mayor Williams, Deputy Mayor Graham, and this Council, we are now resurrecting public child protection in the District from that state of affairs.

While there are no quick fixes for decades of neglect, a new and vastly improved CFSA is under construction. In the past 15 months, we have already achieved real and measurable improvement for children in several key areas, torn down the legal and institutional barriers that had prevented reform in the past, and launched many new initiatives designed to yield positive outcomes in the future. In fact, the opportunity for substantive and lasting positive change has never been better. In this first year, we have gathered the ropes, developed a new pattern for weaving them together, and begun to tie the many of knots necessary to construct a strong safety net for children and families. Through all of our continuing commitment and with adequate time and support, we can make that safety net a reality.

June 15, 2002 was the first anniversary of the end of the Federal Court Receivership. We anticipate that very shortly, the LaShawn Court Monitor will issue its report on the first-year performance of CFSA as a District government agency, after the close of the Receivership. The report will be the definitive assessment of our progress against a series of ambitious baseline performance measures established last year. I anticipate that the report will show significant progress from where we began just one year ago, yet will reflect that there is still a long way to go to achieve our vision for children in the District: to ensure children's safety, enable children to grow up in permanent families, and promote the wellbeing of the most vulnerable families and most fragile children. I look forward to providing a detailed briefing to the Committee upon the issuance of the report.

To illustrate the progress for children and families, and to show just how a strong and effective CFSA can make a difference in results for children and families, I would like to offer you a recent example where our newly developed clinical staffing process delivered a

positive outcome for a teenager and family with a long history of involvement with our agency. The teen girl, who is also a mother, experienced difficulty in adjusting to placements due to substance abuse and significant mental health and educational needs. Via the staffing process, our clinical team brought together the family, a mentor, a foster mother, the psychiatrist, attorney, guardian *ad litem*, the potential placement case manager, and the CFSA team of social workers and placement specialists. As a group, they developed a plan to help this teen mother transition from an in-patient substance abuse program to a supervised residential setting in the District. The plan also included a system of care and wraparound support to help her move to independence and achieve her educational goals, while still developing skills to care for her child. Significantly, the teen mother was directly involved in the planning and decision making, which vastly increases her chances for success. Collaboration among all the key players and agencies involved made a significant positive difference for this teen girl. CFSA was unable to spearhead coordination of services in this manner just a few months ago. And in time, we hope to provide comprehensive, coordinated care like this to all children who enter the child welfare system.

At the same time, we know that we face significant challenges – problems that took many years to develop and will take time to solve. For example, for a long time, the District has relied far too heavily on group care, rather than families, to care for children who cannot live safely at home. At the same time that group care providers were asked to take on an enormous task, they were historically under-funded and understaffed, and the District for years had no regulatory or licensing structure to support and ensure quality. We have taken major steps to change all of that, yet we have much more to do. Among the very youngest children, those under age 6, we have cut the number in group settings in half, from almost

100 in May 2001 to under 50 this past summer. We have published the first-ever licensing standards for group homes, are licensing Independent Living settings for teens this summer and fall, and are on track to license group homes by the deadline of January 1, 2003. As a result of what we have learned this summer, we have strengthened our efforts further with a focus on all children age 12 and under in group care, and we are engaged in staffings for all these children beginning with the youngest and the medically fragile in order to identify families for them. Our goal is to have all our children placed in family settings which places them in the least restrictive and most consistent care giving settings in order to promote their developmental wellbeing. Ahead of us, we have additional critically important work in foster parent recruitment and retention, in training and support for group home staff, and in the development of services that will support even the most fragile young people in family settings.

The remainder of my testimony will provide details about our accomplishments to date, new initiatives that should yield positive results over time, and next steps on our agenda for FY 2003. As a backdrop for these remarks, here is a snapshot of CFSA today.

CFSA in Brief

CFSA serves children who have been abused and neglected, or who are at risk of abuse and neglect, and their families. Our mission is to promote the safety, permanence, and well being of children in the District of Columbia through public and private partnerships focused on strengthening families with services that ensure cultural competence, accountability, and professional integrity.

Children and families typically become involved with CFSA through a report to our Hotline, 671-SAFE. We receive 550 to 750 calls a month, of which 300 to 400 or roughly half are reports of abuse or neglect that require investigation. The other half of the calls are handled by providing information or referring families to other community services. At any given time, our ongoing caseload includes about 6,600 children and families. About 3,000 children are in paid out-of-home care, including foster and kinship homes, group homes, and other residential facilities, and about 300-400 more are in unpaid, “third-party” placements, largely with relatives. We also serve approximately 3,300 families in their own homes.

In addition to local child protection, CFSA also implements state-level functions including licensing, monitoring, development of policy and regulations, information systems, fiscal analysis, budgeting, contracting, and revenue collection. Finally, we partner with community agencies, including the Healthy Families/Thriving Communities Collaboratives, and with a range of providers who offer services to children and families.

Currently, CFSA has about 800 employees. As of the end of August, this included 257 licensed BSW and MSW social workers engaged in all aspects of our work from investigations through adoptions, along with 41 social worker trainees, who have an MSW and are in the process of licensure. With the new hires in September, not included in this number, we have filled all of our social worker vacancies with BSW and MSW qualified social workers and student trainees. We are very proud to have met this commitment to the Council and the Mayor and look forward to the additional positions included in our FY03 budget, which will enable us to continue bringing down caseloads. Later in my testimony, I will highlight our accomplishments to date in our staff recruitment efforts. One of our

immediate priorities is having our new social workers trained and carrying caseloads by the end of this year so that we can continue to ensure that our children and families are receiving the highest quality of care.

Accomplishments

We are proud to report on an array of accomplishments guided by the strategic plan that I presented to you last year. As you know, the seven goals that shaped CFSA's focus during the year, driven by the extensive information about our starting point provided to us through the Federal Child and Family Services Review, the Court Monitor's Review, among other sources, included: recruit and retain social workers; investigate abuse and neglect reports; expedite permanency for children; recruit and retain foster homes; promote agency and neighborhood-based resources; enhance agency information system; and complete court requirements.

Within these goals, we focused a great deal of effort on meeting the set of 20 measurable results agreed to by the District, the LaShawn Plaintiffs, and the Federal Court as the key indicators of performance during the probationary period. These twenty indicators, which were measured by the Court Monitor in the summer of 2001 to determine a baseline and again this summer to determine progress after one year, represent a challenging and worthwhile agenda that addresses key aspects of agency operations. Meeting these measures requires planning and implementation of numerous complex internal changes as well as extensive mending and forging of external relationships. In many cases, pursuit of a single baseline measure has revealed numerous issues that must be resolved before we can move forward. We are having to lay a new and much firmer foundation on which to build better

service to children and families. Here are the major accomplishments and initiatives that now form that foundation.

Investigations and Reporting: As you know, CFSA now has responsibility for investigating both abuse and neglect. This is the critical first step in protecting child victims, so we must investigate reports of abuse and neglect effectively and promptly. Our Court performance standard was to reduce the agency's backlog of investigations (that is, those overdue by 30 days or more) from the baseline level of more than 800 at the end of May 2001 to fewer than 300 at the end of May 2002. CFSA also set an internal goal that by September, 80% of investigations will be completed in the 30-day time frame; we are on track to accomplish that goal, with an improvement from about 35% last fall to 62% in FY 02 as of August. Key improvement strategies have included: increased staffing in Intake and Investigations, stronger oversight, extensive training, improved policies and protocols, and improved information systems support. Since investigations represent our first opportunity to identify and protect child victims, this progress represents a significant strengthening of the safety net for children in our community. The resources provided by the Council and the Mayor to ensure appropriate staffing levels in Investigations – our goal is the standard mandated by the Federal Court Order of 12 investigations per worker per month – are critical to continued success in protecting children's safety.

We also have two new developments in the area of investigations and reporting. First, CFSA has dedicated a separate unit of investigators to respond to allegations of abuse and neglect in out-of-home-care settings. This Institutional Investigations Unit investigates all reports of abuse and neglect in out-of-home care, including both group homes and foster homes. The

creation of this unit last winter was a direct result of the unification of the previously fragmented child welfare system just about a year ago, on October 1, 2001: for the first time, the District had a child welfare agency with responsibility for abuse and neglect as well as for quality and monitoring in out-of-home care. In the past, there was no single clear point to which concerns about the safety of children in out-of-home care could be reported; now, we are able to promptly and professionally investigate and take action where appropriate. As a result of increased reporting, the unit has grown from two investigators last winter to five currently and six planned.

Second, we are taking a number of actions to strengthen knowledge of and compliance with the District's mandatory reporting laws – laws which require specific professionals to report known or suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect. Following incidents of sexual activity among children in group homes this summer, CFSA sent a letter to all group home providers reminding them that they are mandated reporters, professionals who must report known or suspected incidents of abuse and neglect promptly to our hotline, which is staffed around the clock. We have recently completed a new booklet for mandated reporters and are about to begin providing mandatory training for group-home staff on site at their facilities. We are also developing a policy for referral to the Office of Corporation Counsel (OCC) in cases where we learn a mandated reporter has failed to report suspected abuse or neglect.

Adoptions: As of this writing, on September 26, 2002, we have recorded 299 finalized adoptions, and we anticipate that as additional adoptions are signed in the last days of the fiscal year, we will exceed the 300 adoptions that we have as a goal for FY02. Currently, we have 38 cases in court awaiting final approval for adoption. In addition, we have already

exceeded the annual goal for adoptions set for us by the Federal Court: during the year from June 1, 2001 to May 31, 2002, we finalized 330 adoptions, a 21% increase compared to 273 the previous year and surpassing the target of 328 set by the Court. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Court and the Assistant Corporation Counsels (ACCs) in their work with our social workers in this significant accomplishment. This measurable improvement for children results in part from our close relationship with the Court that we have developed through the Family Court process and the expansion in the number of highly skilled ACCs now working with our social workers on behalf of children in our care. I will further highlight efforts in this area in the legal reform accomplishments update later in my testimony.

Licensing and Monitoring: A year ago, for the first time, the District established regulations governing quality in group homes serving children and youth. As I reported last February, CFSA established an internal unit to license and monitor these facilities. Currently, this unit is on track to meet the licensing deadline for group homes of January 1, 2003. This summer, licensing application packets went out to all group-home providers. We have already had the opportunity to learn from the earlier deadline for licensing Independent Living providers, which serve teens who are transitioning to independence. We were able to provisionally license all of these providers, with time frames ranging from 45 to 90 days for them to comply with all regulations in order to achieve full licensure. From this experience, we learned that the licensure process itself led to improvements in a number of key quality areas such as facilities and that all the providers had to address a number of areas for action in order to be licensed. The Mayor's FY03 budget plan contains critical resources needed to achieve the improvements in the quality of care for children that are the goal of the new

licensing provisions, including resources to enable providers to meet strict regulations required to protect safety, such as staffing requirements, and resources to complete the staffing of CFSA's new licensing and monitoring function.

Congregate Care: While Licensing and Monitoring is working to improve the quality and safety of group home settings for children, CFSA is continuing to move away from reliance on group home care, especially for young children. The District has a long history of over reliance on group care for children of all ages. But experts now agree that healthy emotional development of children, especially those age 12 and under, is dependent upon the bonding experiences that family-like settings can best provide. To reduce the number of children in congregate care, CFSA closed three emergency shelters several months ago and reduced the total number of children under age six in congregate care by half. CFSA has also expedited its efforts to reduce the number of all children age 12 and under in group settings. In addition to taking tough administrative action that addressed two specific incidents of sexual activity among children in group home settings that came to light in July, social workers visited all CFSA children age 12 and under in group homes to check on their safety and well being. A clinical team compared reports from those visits with group home monitoring records and set priorities for working closely with children to move them into family settings that are appropriate to their needs, starting with medically fragile children and very young children.

Family Settings for Children: To reduce over reliance on congregate care, safe family-like settings for abused and neglected children must be available. CFSA's strategic plan from the beginning has focused on both recruitment and support of foster, kinship, and adoptive

families. We have already accomplished our FY02 goal on the Mayor's performance plan of recruiting 100 new foster families. In fact, we have far exceeded that goal by recruiting 233 foster homes during the fiscal year. We are continuing our recruitment efforts to ensure a further reduction in the number of young children and infants in congregate care facilities, and to provide a broader base of placement resources for children that will enable us to match children with foster parents who can best meet their individual and special needs. And we are working hard to build links between community and neighborhood networks and foster families, both for recruitment and support: for example, we are building in recruitment and support of foster and kin families into our contracts with our Collaborative partners. We have also expanded our Emergency Assessment Program, which involves the Collaboratives at the very beginning - when a report of abuse or neglect is made and may lead to placement – in order to ensure outreach to potential community and extended family supports. But we have a long way to go to ensure both a sufficient number of families to care for all the children who need temporary or permanent homes, and sufficient support for those families so that they can meet the needs of our children.

Over the long term, increasing the number of foster and kin families and supporting them to meet children's needs will involve:

- Redoubling our efforts to recruit and support foster families through community networks, as well as our outreach to extended family. We are very proud that as a result of our commitment to this work, we recently competed for and won a place in a new grant program sponsored by the Casey Family Programs-Washington, DC and David and Lucile Packard Foundations. The Breakthrough Series Collaborative on Recruiting and Retaining Resource Families will bring together child welfare agencies from across

the nation to share knowledge, strategies, challenges, and successes. The goal is to encourage major, rapid changes that will produce breakthrough results in recruiting and retaining foster, kinship, and adoptive families. Out of 50 applicants, CFSA won one of the 20 places in the program. We also received a full scholarship that will pay for travel, lodging, and meals during three two-day learning sessions.

- Improving community-based support services and our own monitoring so more children can remain safely at home or with relatives while their parents overcome difficulties.

One example of our work in this area is that in FY03, our work with our Collaborative partners will include a focus on community supports for families that have not yet experienced abuse or neglect but that are at high risk for abuse and neglect: for example, families who have been reported to the Hotline and the report, while unsupported, still raised concerns about the level of stress in the family and about future implications for the children.

- Continuing to negotiate workable border agreements with Maryland and Virginia. We are very proud of our progress in negotiating an Interim Agreement with the state of Maryland that focuses on ensuring the safety, stability, and wellbeing of all the region's children. A very important accomplishment for children is that the agreement ends in principle the barriers that have stood in the way of placing District children with kin in Maryland; we are working diligently to address the last remaining implementation issues so we can put the new approach into practice. Through the agreement, we have also ensured that District children have access to licensed non-kin family homes in Maryland when there are no available appropriate alternatives in the District, reconciled our data with Maryland regarding children and foster homes (and achieved our first electronic data exchange), and improved our ability to work with providers in a coordinated

fashion across the two states, among other steps. We have also worked closely with Prince George's County to identify and address resource and other issues that affect children and families across the two jurisdictions. Building on this progress, I am working jointly with Maryland Secretary of Social Services, Emelda Johnson to convene a meeting with the District, Virginia, Maryland, and several metropolitan counties as a step towards a broader metropolitan agreement.

Contract Reform: In order to ensure that all of CFSA's services support our mission of ensuring children's safety, permanence, and wellbeing, we must focus not only on improving our internal practice but also on strengthening the link between the crucial services provided by our partners who provide contracted services and our core mission. Many observers, including this Committee as well as providers themselves, have pointed out that the contract structure used by CFSA in the past is not well linked to the agency's mission or to the critical results we want to accomplish for children. For example, a group home or foster care provider that does an excellent job of supporting children to be reunited with their families will not be rewarded through the current contract arrangements for that quality work. To change this and link our contracts more tightly with our goals, we are developing new RFP's in three areas: Group Care, Family-Based Care, and Community and Preventive Services. Our goal is to ensure that these contracts reflect our mission and our values, including that they will be performance-based, family-focused, culturally competent, and linked to the community. We introduced our new strategy to the provider community through an open meeting in August and will be scheduling additional meetings for more detailed input, as we committed in the original session. We also will be seeking input from a range of other stakeholders. In order to ensure continuity of services while we are developing the new

structure, we have extended current contracts through March 31, 2003, with the goal of having the new contracts in place in April. The deadline is tight, but we believe it represents a reasonable balance between the sense of urgency we all feel with a commitment to a smooth transition.

Staff Recruitment: Recruitment and retention of a full complement of qualified social workers is essential to reducing individual caseloads which, in turn, will vastly improve child protection. We are delighted to report to this Committee that we have made major progress and in fact have achieved our commitment to the Committee of virtually filling all vacancies allotted to our social workers at the BSW and MSW levels with licenses, and the student trainees at the MSW level who will become licensed in the upcoming months. The additional social worker vacancies in our FY03 budget are critical to our ability to continue this remarkable momentum, so that we can approach over time the caseload ratios set out in the Federal Court Order. Specifically, as of the end of August, we had on board 234 MSW Social Workers, 23 BSW Social Work associates, and 41 Master's level Social Work Trainees (who are still pending licensure) for a total of 298 social workers plus student trainees. Not counting the student trainees, who will not be carrying cases until they are licensed, this number reflects an increase of 13 since July 2002. We have revamped our process for ensuring prompt licensure of student trainees and are seeing strong results; we are also continuing to recruit additional licensed social workers. In addition, our student intern program brought us 26 student interns from local MSW programs in September.

Also during the summer, the District and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service entered into an agreement. It allows licensed social workers,

nurses, and other health-care professionals from the PHS Commissioned Corps to be detailed to District agencies based on needs and opportunities. CFSA moved immediately to implement the agreement as an additional strategy for bringing experienced social workers on board. So far, two PHS social workers have chosen this option and joined us in September, and one is scheduled to start in October.

In addition, CFSA received a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation to focus on recruiting and retaining social workers. Under the grant, a Recruitment Director was detailed from PHS. Working with other key members of our team, she will research and implement best practices from around the country that can help CFSA become and remain fully staffed.

Training: CFSA recently shifted from an outsourced management of staff training to establishing an internally run Office of Training Services under the auspices of our Principal Deputy. The intention of the change is to strengthen the quality of the training provided to our new and existing staff. The training staff is currently working with national experts to assess our current curricula and plan for quality improvements. While working to strengthen the training provided to staff, the Office of Training services continues to offer competency based pre-service training that begins to equip direct service staff with the knowledge and skills necessary to be effective while on the job.

In addition, CFSA's on-the-job training program where new direct service staff are placed in training units supervised by highly skilled and experienced supervisors is solidly in place. Due to the influx of new staff, we are now operating eight training units that provide rigorous, high quality training. The goal of these specialized training units is to ensure new staff will have the necessary skills to manage cases having mastered basic competencies in

child welfare. We anticipated that most of our current student trainees will graduate and enter regular units from October through December.

Caseload Equalization: In an effort to lower caseloads to benefit children, we are now reviewing weekly the case assignments by worker and unit to identify and correct excessive individual caseloads. The average caseload, across all ongoing units, is 28. These caseload inequities mean that there is considerable variation. Our goal is to correct these inequities to ensure that children are protected. Our caseload equalization focus has resulted in us, for the first time, having good information about cases in total, by unit, and by worker. With this information, we will at last be able to track accurately not only overall averages but also individual caseloads. For example, as we succeed in our adoptions work, we have the opportunity for children with a goal of adoption to move to adoption workers and reduce caseload in over-stressed In-home and Reunification units.

Legal Reform: We also have begun to utilize the expanded legal services from Office of Corporation Counsel to assist the social workers and work toward better outcomes for children. As you may know, there are now 41 Assistant Corporation Counsel who have been co-located at CFSA since April, 2002. This expanded legal team and co-location have allowed social workers and attorneys to begin developing the kind of relationships which we expect will translate into improved safety for children and permanency decisions made in compliance with ASFA timelines. Today, social workers now are represented in 90% of the hearings, and as cases are returned to the Family Court by judges sitting outside the Family Court, this number will rise to 100%. ACCs are participating in staffings where legal issues are involved. This Spring, an intensive effort by ACCs led to the filing of 104 petitions to

terminate parental rights in cases where children had a goal of adoption and could not return safely home. As envisioned in the Federal Adoption and Safe Families Act, this step enables children who cannot go home to be adopted more quickly. ACCs are actively participating in the training academy as trainers, where relationships can be built from a social worker's first day at the agency. In fact, ACCs and social workers developed and participated in a half day joint training of new Magistrate Judges. While the benefits of this improved relationship and structure are just beginning to be felt, we are enthusiastic with the possibilities created by this new relationship and will continue to work with the Corporation Counsel, who has enthusiastically embraced this effort.

We are also pleased to report on the progress made in implementing the Family Court Act. We have developed a close relationship with Judge Satterfield, Presiding Judge of the Family Court, and worked with him to identify 1,200 hundred cases that have been returned to the Family Court. This means that these cases are now being heard by judges who are specializing in family issues, and it also has reduced the number of judges before whom our attorneys and social workers must appear. In identifying these cases, CFSA, the Court, and other stakeholders worked together to identify categories of cases that we believed to be best suited for rapid transfer into the Family Court. We looked for cases where permanency has the potential to be quickly achieved, such as cases where a child has been living in a kinship setting that appears stable and well-suited to adoption or guardianship. We also looked for cases where older children appeared to be remaining in care primarily for service needs, such as mental health or retardation services, rather than for ongoing issues of abuse or neglect, with the aim of collaborating with other agencies to provide a smooth transition into ongoing services that could make it possible to close the case.

We expect an additional 1,200 cases to be identified this Spring, and once again are working with the court on implementing the Plan. With input from CFSA, the Court developed a series of form orders, which will provide uniformity and will allow us to modify our FACES system for data entry purposes. Similarly, we have developed formats for court reports upon which the court provided input. Our new relationship with the Family Court has been important as we finalized our 300 adoptions, allowing us to quickly identify and work through issues that were delaying their completion.

We also are working with the Court and with the Family Court Services Liaison in Deputy Mayor Graham's Office as the Court and the District move together into next phase of implementing the law, the use of judicial teams and full vertical case management. Under the leadership of Deputy Mayor Carolyn Graham and in collaboration with the Superior Court, we are providing input into the creation of the Family Court and Family Court liaison activities, which will be implemented in phases currently underway. The liaison's role is to facilitate a formal structure that interfaces directly with the Family Court and integrates child welfare services and related social services provided to individuals and families served by the Family Court.

Information Systems: The quality and timeliness of the information in FACES continues to improve. Over the past year, training and practice has made workers more proficient in using FACES, a number of enhancements have made FACES easier to use, and managers increasingly rely on FACES reports to identify good performance and problem areas. For example, senior management review the key FACES indicators once a month in our

Management Team meeting, with a focus both on what the indicators tell us about performance and caseload and on any issues of accuracy in the data. A key step this year has been the development of a close working relationship between Agency Users, particularly program operations, and FACES. This relation is formalized in a Change Support Committee that meets every other week to define areas where FACES could better support social work and other agency function. The Committee consisting of representatives from all parts of the Agency assigns priorities to the defined improvements and tracks their implementation. In combination, these factors are leading to substantial improvement.

CFSA is improving the information available to protect child safety and achieve permanency goals through data sharing with other agencies and the Court. CFSA is now an active member of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee and accesses records from other agencies through the JUSTIS system to more effectively conduct diligent searches, adoptive and foster parent clearances and location of relevant principals at the report and investigations stage of Intake operations. CFSA is working closely with the Court to implement electronic exchange of critical information including the Court calendar, Court orders and Court reports.

Partnerships. In addition to reforming the institutional structure of the child welfare system, a key accomplishment of this past year has been building new partnerships and reinvigorating existing ones. This work is critical for children, because we cannot achieve our goals of safety, permanence, and well being without these partnerships. For example, our return from Federal Court Receivership to District government has opened up many

opportunities to connect with other District agencies that offer critical services to our families and children – agencies such as the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Health and the Department of Human Services – and to benefit from the leadership of Deputy Mayor Carolyn Graham in her work with the cluster of agencies that work with children, youth, families, and elders. One example that I know is of particular interest to the Committee is our work with the Department of Mental Health. We are working closely with DMH both on individual cases where the expertise of the DMH clinical team can assist us in achieving the best outcomes for children and families and in strengthening our system of service delivery. In FY03, we are aiming to work closely with DMH to support our service providers in achieving DMH certification, which will improve services to children and families and also ensure that Federal Medicaid revenues are available to support appropriate services.

Next Steps

The past year has been a transition period for the Agency following nearly six years of Federal Court receivership. We have made substantial progress as we strive to better protect children in our care. The federal court baseline achievement requirements and the Court Monitor's report represent milestones reached and underline the need to keep up the momentum for improving outcomes for our children. Our next steps will involve bringing all of our work, both internal and with providers, into alignment with the mission and goals of reform. These next steps involve broader and deeper reforms specifically as it relates to contracting with providers around necessary services for our children as well as staying the course in these tough times of budget negotiations and resource challenges. We

know that in order to continue to address the ever changing needs of our children we must continue to strengthen our system through our various partnerships.

As a result of our intensive focus on practice, the results we have accomplished already, and our progress in identifying barriers and challenges that we must overcome to achieve future results, we anticipate bringing forth proposals to you as part of the next steps in the reform plan. We look forward to talking with you further regarding an array of issues, including our plans to ensure that we are able to recruit and retain sufficient high quality social workers able to meet the needs of our families well into the future; to strengthen the protection of children through enhancements to mandated reporting; to strengthen access to information needed for child abuse and neglect investigations and for approval of foster and kin placements; and to make other improvements that will assist us in achieving permanent families for children, implementing the Family Court provisions, and ensuring children's wellbeing, including appropriate health care for children in our care.

In conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude for your commitment and support, which have enabled us, in the fifteen months that CFSA has been a District agency, to put in place a tremendously promising structure for reform. The task ahead of us now is to keep steady at the work of turning that new structure into positive outcomes for children and families in care.

Thank you. I look forward to answering any questions